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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: HEALTH, INTERIOR MINISTERS SURVIVE INTERPELLATION,
PEOPLES PARTY MAY NOT

REF: LJUBLJANA 0106

1. (U) SUMMARY: Opposition-launched motions for the removal of Health Minister Dusan Keber and Interior Minister Rado Bohinc were debated by the National Assembly on 29 March and 30 March, respectively. Keber retained his position by a 47-28 vote, along party lines. Bohinc survived by a 46-30 vote. The Peoples Party (SLS), a junior governing coalition member, abstained rather than following through on its earlier public threats to support the interpellation motions. One LDS deputy crossed party lines to vote for Bohinc's removal. In the end, SLS is likely to suffer the most from the escapade. END SUMMARY.

Keber

2. (U) On 27 February, the opposition Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) and New Slovenia Party (NSi) filed a motion for the interpellation of Health Minister Dusan Keber accusing him of "apparent violations of legislation." The motion was supported immediately by the Slovenian National Party (SNS) and soon thereafter by the opposition Youth Party (SMS). Three of the four governing coalition parties -- the Liberal Democratic Party (LDS), the United List of Social Democrats (ZLSD), and the Pensioners Party (DeSUS) -- stood behind Keber. The Peoples Party (SLS); however, publicly vacillated for over a month, claiming it would decide based on Keber's responses to the accusations.

3. (U) The National Assembly considered the SDS/NSi interpellation motion on 29 March in a day-long debate conducted as part of its regular March session. Among other complaints, SDS and NSi accused Keber of selling the Trnovo Hospital at an undervalued price, overspending for MoH offices, delay unduly in building a much-needed pediatric clinic, involvement in a highly questionable tender for the purchase of operating tables for Klinicni Center -- the main hospital in Ljubljana, and a poor performance in preparing an exhaustive health reform package. Keber refuted all accusations -- some more convincingly than others -- and said that attacks on the reform were expected since it changes current situation.

4. (U) The vote at day's end was along party lines and its outcome was no surprise. Twenty-eight opposition deputies voted in favor of the interpellation motion. Forty-seven deputies supported Keber's retention by voting against the motion. All ten SLS deputies abstained from voting, despite the party's many public hints that it would support the interpellation.

Bohinc

5. (U) Also on 27 February, the SDS filed an interpellation motion against Interior Minister Rado Bohinc (ZLSD) because of his "inadequate" implementation of the April 2003 Constitutional Court decision regarding the "erased" (reftel). On 01 March SNS announced its grudging support for the "badly drafted" SDS motion and on 02 March, NSi decided to back it as well. LDS and ZLSD immediately voiced opposition to Bohinc's removal, with DeSus eventually following suit. On 22 March, junior coalition party SLS made headlines when it announced it would back the SDS motion against Bohinc, despite public warnings on the consequences of such a decision from PM Rop.

6. (U) The National Assembly considered the Bohinc interpellation on 30 March in another day-long debate. The primary set of complaints against Bohinc revolved around his management of various aspects of the "erased" issue. He also was accused of procedural errors in the purchase of a police boat, chaotic management of a variety of public administration issues (salaries, pensions), and misuse of the Ministry's publication, "Slovene Administration." Bohinc refuted all accusations and emphasized that his actions on the "erased," however controversial, were in accordance with the Constitution and the law.

17. (U) Again, the final vote on the motion basically followed party lines, with 30 deputies supporting Bohinc's removal and 46 opposing it. Of interest, one LDS parliamentarian broke party ranks to vote in favor of the

interpellation. Additionally, five SLS deputies abstained from voting, despite the party's clear public stance supporting the interpellation. The five announced their decision to abstain in a public letter to SLS President Janez Podobnik, in which they argued that supporting the interpellation would mean violation of the coalition agreement and that the party should first leave the coalition before supporting the interpellation.

Comment

18. (SBU) Both interpellations were doomed from the start. To be successful, an interpellation motion must receive 46 votes in favor. LDS (Keber) and ZLSD (Bohinc) together have 45 seats in the National Assembly without the support of the other two coalition parties and the two ethnic minority representatives who historically vote with the coalition. Thus, the two opposition initiatives were intended to serve mainly as a podium from which to criticize GoS actions on high profile issues causing public discontent -- health care reform and the erased.

19. (SBU) An additional, and somewhat unexpected, benefit that SDS and NSi got from the interpellation is the split it caused within SLS, with whom they usually compete for votes. In this regard both parties might see a slight increase in their popularity in the April public opinion polls, at SLS expense.

110. (SBU) SLS seems likely to suffer the most from the entire escapade. While the party could have gained some voter support by publicly standing up to LDS and ZLSD on an issue of principle, the abstentions now make it look both disloyal and weak-kneed. At the same time, the party's last-minute reversal is unlikely to save it from internal coalition reprisals. The betrayal has already occurred and the political circles will no doubt suffer the consequences. Although SLS won't be kicked out of the coalition, its policy influence will be significantly reduced and it will be kept out of the loop on any sensitive political strategy issues -- exactly the consequences it likely would have suffered if it had supported the interpellations. END COMMENT.

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